FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF WILMINGTON DELAWARE
ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Weaving a Tapestry of Love and Action
Our Mission

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington is a beloved community that nourishes minds and spirits, fights injustice, and transforms the world through loving action.

Weaving a tapestry of love and action . . .

... many unique threads woven into a whole, embodied in our core values:

- Love and compassion,
- Growth and discovery
- Freedom and Justice,
- Wonder and Joy.

Our Vision:

At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, people of all ages:

- Feel safe, accepted, and loved – and empowered to be our authentic selves.
- Gain new perspectives and grow as informed, spiritual human beings.
- Act on our shared values and Unitarian Universalist identity to fight for a more just world.
- Experience wonder, inspiration, fulfillment, and joy.

Covenant of Right Relations

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington

With a sincere desire that our congregation flourish, I promise:

- to **be mindful to nurture** my own spiritual health, so that I may help bring a spirit of balance and wholeness to our church community;
- to **be attentive** to guests and new members as well as supporting and encouraging those whom I already know, thereby contributing to an atmosphere of welcome and hospitality;
- to **seek to understand** others with humility and an open mind, and interact with my fellow UU members with integrity and respect;
- to **use wisdom and patience** in challenging or conflicting situations, and to seek honest reconciliation while recognizing we may not always come to agreement;
- to **be involved**, knowing that my skills, resources, wisdom and good will are important to my church community;
- to **uphold our covenant** to each other in our interactions in the wider community, as exemplars of our empowering faith.

I join with others in this covenant as we seek to become known for our vitality, warmth, and transformative energy.
MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The First Unitarian Church Trustees have used the promises of our covenant to build on the change begun these past few years:

- Keep our church mission as our focus
- Support the Executive Team
- Celebrate diversity of thoughts
- Implement our governance model
- Celebrate our accomplishments
- Represent the Board and our Church with one voice

Each Board member has committed to volunteering to projects in the church in order to understand the church’s work and aspirations of the congregation and to have real time connection with our members and friends. These efforts include stewardship, membership, healthy congregations’ leadership training, Emmanuel Dining room, Independent Living for Young Adults aging out of foster care, Children and Youth Religious Exploration, Black Lives Matter, the Andy Cope building team, worship associates, building and grounds, ushers and greeters, potlucks, office volunteers and social action, workshops or marches to name just a few.

Among the accomplishments of the Board this year are:

- Revised financial policies to provide consistent and informed stewardship of the church’s assets;
- Invested in the socially responsible First State Community Loan Program; since its incorporation in 1992, First State CLF has disbursed nearly $27 million to over 1100 small businesses and community organizations
- Rededicated public policy resolutions, demonstrating in a public manner the values held by our church members: Black Lives Matter, Climate Change, Declaration of Conscience (commitment to fundamentals of justice and compassions), Democracy Spring and Democracy action (focused on civil rights and voting reform), Higher Ground Moral Declaration (committed to moral values and agenda), and the New Jim Crow – Racism and Incarnation.
- Acknowledgment from local community organizations such as NAACP, YWCA, Wilmington Peacekeepers, Southbridge civic leaders, Delaware elected officials and local & state
news organizations.

- Focused on the long-term mission and well-being of the Congregation, setting mutually aligned priorities in shared ministry with Rev. Roberta Finkelstein.

- Began the discernment process with the congregation to determine how to best manage the cost of our facilities.

We have seen several visitors arriving to our sanctuary, seeking a spiritual home, a connection to like-minded people, religious education for their families or a way to connect with our public outreach projects. In a recent Pathways to Membership class, one attendee said he simply was looking for a place “that did not hate”, reflecting an extraordinary reason why First Unitarian matters in today’s world.

Our congregation is blessed to have such talented members giving their service and time to our beloved community. Each Sunday we say as part of our Unison Affirmation, “...with a sincere desire for our congregation to flourish...” Indeed, we have flourished this year and know the coming years will be exciting for our church.

In Love and Peace,

Your 2016-17 Board of Trustees
Four goals are articulated in the contract between our Developmental Minister, Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, and the Congregation:

- Working together with lay leadership, transition from policy governance to policy-based governance to implement a shared ministry. Much of the infrastructure work has now been accomplished. The Board and Executive Team have continued to clarify their respective roles, and a very positive and collaborative working relationship is now in place.

- Lead the congregation in creating the means to function successfully as a single minister church. By focusing on the programs and activities that are essential to the core mission of the congregation, it has been possible for both the minister and congregation to make the adjustments needed to function with one minister. For this success to continue, everybody will need to continue to practice patience, as things don’t always get done as quickly as some would like.

- As articulated in the strategic plan, lead First Unitarian in attracting new members and increasing member retention/engagement. Now that we are two years into the Developmental Ministry program, the minister and Executive Team are turning their attention from infrastructure to the cultural changes that will need to take place for the growth goal to be realized. Rev. Roberta and the Executive Team have spent some time on background research this year, and will be engaging the congregation in a process of discernment about growth and the inevitable changes that need to happen before growth can occur.

- Lead First Unitarian in creating a culture of voluntarism and member engagement. By putting in place a new structure for social justice and outreach, we intend to make it easier for the congregation to focus on significant issues of social concern in effective ways. We continue to welcome the ideas and energy of many members of the congregation. The new banners, more varied uses of our electronic sign, the exploration of veganism, adult programs on topics as varied as retirement planning and the drug war are all examples of member driven innovations.

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**OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM**

Reverend Roberta Finkelstein, Developmental Minister

Marina VanRenssen, Business Manager

Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music

Dale Megill, Lay Member at Large
“We experience Beloved Community whenever and wherever individuals, groups and institutions choose connection, individuality, creativity and mindfulness over separation, individualism, destruction and denial. Beloved Community rests in the awareness that—all evidence to the contrary—we belong to one another.”

First Unitarian Church is our Beloved Community.

The spiritual practice of welcome is important at First Unitarian. As an official Welcoming Congregation, we strive to include all who feel in sync with our mission. The Unitarian Universalist Welcoming Congregation program was designed to “make sure lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are full members of our faith communities.”

Our welcome begins when you see our signs outside our church building, visit our website or Facebook page, and enter our doors. All people arriving at First Unitarian on Sunday morning are greeted warmly and helped to find a seat by our volunteer welcome team, our greeters and ushers. This year, our ushers, greeters, volunteers working with our children, office volunteers and staff all received training on safety practices, developed by a Security Task Force, as we strive to be equipped to handle emergency situations that might arise.

Visitors are invited to visit our welcome table, staffed by members who are happy to answer their questions and help them get connected with groups and activities that interest them.

There are many ways to get involved as a newcomer and get to know others. Circle Suppers help build community among long-time members, new members and visitors. They are a great way to socialize and meet new and old.

“Had a lovely evening [at the Circle Supper] and enjoyed the delightful ‘random mix’ of people. AND thanks for letting a non-member participate!”

1 http://www.uua.org/pacific-western/beloved-community-resources
members and friends outside of the church setting. Participants gather in small groups and share a potluck supper in one another’s homes. Participants rotate at each supper to provide the opportunity to get to know new people.

Hosts are encouraged to create atmospheres in which people get to know each other better. Questions that promote the sharing of information about personal interests and experiences are provided to the hosts in an effort to focus conversations and give everyone an opportunity to talk.

**Multigenerational potluck dinners** are another easy way to get to know each other in an informal setting.

This year, we organized a potluck dinner every 2nd Friday of the month, typically attracting 50-80 people at each dinner. We engaged many teams at First Unitarian to help with hosting the events.

The goal of the potluck dinners is to increase fellowship and friendship at the church. In addition, we had a social action project at every potluck, such as: making Holiday cards for home bound members, caroling in the Sharpley neighborhood, and collecting food for our food closet. Our most popular potluck this year was our Vegan Potluck in November. Not only did our potlucks improve our beloved community by nourishing our spirits, but also our bellies!

Our bi-annual auction and annual coffee house were full of fun and laughs, while raising funds for First Unitarian.

At the coffee house, children and adults entertained us with their talents and humor at our open mic. There was instrumental music, singing, joke telling, karate and more! Our junior youth sold homemade goodies to raise funds for the World Wildlife Fund.

Our theme for the auction this year was April Fool’s Day, held on April 1. Good food, good drink, ample dinners, outings, vacation homes, art, baskets of joy and delectable goodies all added up to fun, fun, fun!

**Dueling hens!**

Awesome karate display

More talent!

Our chefs at the chili cook-off potluck
A big change in our approach to programming this year was our decision to join Soul Matters, a nation-wide consortium of more than 150 Unitarian Universalist congregations who share monthly themes for worship, religious education, music, and small group ministry (Connection Circles). The program staff made the decision as part of our commitment to creating a culture of engagement and shared ministry. We believe that having adults and children focused on the same theme each month will enhance our connections to each other and to the themes. We believe that using the shared theme approach in common with other UU’s will help to enhance our UU identity. Finally, we believe that the Soul Matters approach to small group ministry will help to reinvigorate our Connection Circles program.

Soul Matters encourages personal engagement on a spiritual level more than an intellectual level. A packet of materials is distributed each month so that each participant can not only read about the theme, but choose one of the spiritual exercises provided. The group discussion is about the experience each person has with the exercise; it is a very personal and potentially transformative approach.

We have found that it is easiest to let the Soul Matters materials speak for themselves. “Soul Matters is a distinctive small group curriculum. Like other small group programs, its central goal is to foster circles of trust and deep listening. However, Soul Matters adds four unique components:

1. **Explore the Worship Themes in More Depth.** Soul Matters is not a “stand alone” program. It is designed as a companion program to a congregation’s worship experience. Congregations using Soul Matters position it in their system as “an opportunity to explore our congregation’s monthly worship themes in more depth.”

2. **Experience the Worship Theme, Don’t Just Talk about It.** Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics. Discussing a topic is important. But there is nothing like experiential learning. Honoring this, Soul Matters participants are given a spiritual exercise each month to engage prior to their group meeting.

3. **Questions To Walk With, Not Talk Through.** In traditional small groups, questions are an opportunity for the group to think together. Soul Matters uses questions differently. We see them as tools for individual exploration. Instead of asking our groups to go through the questions and discuss them one by one, Soul Matters participants are asked to read all the questions ahead of time and find the one question that “hooks them”—the one that speaks to and challenges them personally. Participants then live with--or “walk with”--that question for a couple weeks leading up to the group, coming to their meeting, not with an answer to each of the questions on the list, but with a story about how this one particular question lead them to deeper, personal learning. This technique leads us away from abstraction and intellectualizing and challenges us to think about how the topic (and question) apply to our daily living.

4. **A Reminder That UUism is Distinctive, Not an “Anything Goes,” Religion.** Our monthly
themes are not just interesting topics. Rather they focus us on a spiritual value that our UU faith has historically honored and emphasized. At each meeting, we are reminded that our faith promotes a preferred way for us to be in the world. This is why each monthly theme is couched within the sentence: “What does it mean to be a community of . . . “

The Soul Matters materials have been integrated into worship (monthly sermons and multigenerational services each month), Connection Circles, other adult religious education programs, and Children and Youth Religious Exploration. In addition to our Soul Matters program, we have continued to have a variety of other forms of Connection Circle. For the past two years our Short Story group has been using Best American Short Stories for discussion. Since short story writers almost always address some aspect of what it means to be human, we share a wide range of human experiences and our takes on them every time we meet.

Our discussions of these stories lead to an even deeper level of community among us, because each person’s world views and emotions emerge in the course of each evening. Because fiction lets us learn about many different life experiences from various authors’ point of view, we nourish our minds and spirits.

Pastoral Care—Our Pastoral Care team exists to provide support for the First Unitarian Church community, connecting with members in need and focusing on loving action. A training session held in September provided education to the group on current and new practices. With ten trained Pastoral Care Associates, visits were made to hospitals, nursing homes, and people who were recovering at home. Calls were made to follow up on immediate needs and those who were homebound. Two members of our team are consultants with skill sets which are critical for providing the experience needed for First Unitarian Church. Eight additional Pastoral Care Associates, provide excellent support: coordinating food, giving rides for appointments and church, keeping calendars and sending cards, offering a loving presence for memorial receptions and creating a bridge to help and follow our First Unitarian families.

The Knitting Ministry Team members have delivered over 30 caring cloaks to those going through difficult times. In January, the team launched an effort to knit hats and blanket squares for local charity distribution, for those who want to do service knitting on a smaller scale.

Living Well with Chronic Illness (LWCI) and Caregivers’ Groups provide small group settings for pastoral care. The members of LWCI have much in common dealing with health issues and with people who don’t understand the ups and downs as well as the severity of having chronic illness. Before coming to the group, members had been dealing with health problems in isolation. Having a group that listens and deeply understands is an incredible gift. At meetings, members discuss how the recent month has gone. The group abides with a report of bad times and cheers the member for better times. Sometimes there are hugs and they are good too.

Church members who are participating in care giving for a loved one, meet twice a month with the Caregivers’ Group. With those who share similar emotional experiences, it is comforting to be able to talk about feelings and challenges. Caregivers share ideas and resources. Caregivers

Following surgery, “I have been in constant communication with pastoral care . . . Lydia Robb was a joy to talk to and kept my spirits up and Suzie Cornell was an absolute angel in checking up on me separately and bringing me some amazing homemade soup. It not only warmed my belly but warmed my soul and lifted me up.”

– Arthur Hidell, member
give and receive love as they support each other.

From our ingathering service and picnic in September to our Animal Blessing in October to the care and feeding of our facility by our Buildings and Grounds team, we are building community.

In September, we celebrated the end of summer and the beginning of a new church year by sharing water from our summer travels and activities followed by our all-church picnic on our grounds. We were entertained by Arden Kind, a local youth rock band and munched on food from the Mojo Loco food truck and Cajun-Sno snowballs.

Cats, dogs, gerbils and other pets—including fuzzy stuffed animals—were invited to church in October for a Pet Blessing Service. Owners and their pets gathered on the front lawn for a service of appreciation for all animals and then each animal was blessed by Reverend Roberta or Honorary Minister of Music, Scott Ward.

Whether maintaining our building, worshipping or just having fun, there is always someone to get to know better who shares your passion for our spiritual home.

First Unitarian Church has valued growth in Unitarian Universalism, working to help establish new churches in the Joseph Priestley District over more than 60 years. As the denomination reorganizes from districts to regions, First Unitarian’s leadership in establishing a strong local Delmarva Cluster has helped to build strong relationships of mutual support and learning. First Unitarian volunteers are actively engaged in the Central East Region and Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

**Beyond Our Walls**

First Unitarian Church has provided leadership for the Delmarva Cluster Retreat. This weekend included times for worship, for interactive games, for dancing and for reflection and was attended by several of the cluster Unitarian

Games at the Cluster Retreat

In the fall, First Unitarian

Cluster Retreat

Fun at Ingathering
Universalist churches.

First Unitarian support of and participation in Delmarva Cluster activities draws in large part from the First Unitarian Church Denominational Growth Committee (DGC). The DGC exists to grow and strengthen Unitarian Universalism as we increase our presence on the Delmarva Peninsula and Southern New Jersey. This year, First Unitarian provided financial support through our Grants for Growth program, awarding a grant to the UU Congregation of Southern Delaware. Grants for growth are specific grants that promote growth of the congregation. Since its inception in 1997, First Unitarian has given over $113,000 in grants for growing churches in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey.

The Denominational Growth Committee also champions the Chalice Lighter grant program in our congregation. This Joseph Priestley District program is instrumental in supporting Unitarian Universalist congregations to achieve a variety of goals which contribute to their growth.

There were 1,716 delegates at the 2016 UUA General Assembly (GA) in Columbus, Ohio, in June 2016, and 126 delegates participating offsite, including a full delegation of 8 from First Unitarian. The total of 1,842 delegates represented 562 congregations in the United States and beyond.

As reported by UU World, the GA delegates reaffirmed the 2015 vote “to support the Black Lives Matter movement with spirited worship services, packed workshops, and an offering of almost $90,000 to support the Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU) organizing collective. A rally for racial justice featured black organizers and faith leaders, as well as a public statement by the leaders of four denominations who pledged unity ‘in the struggle for justice and compassion.’”

First Unitarian Church was given the Blue Ribbon Award by the UU-United Nations Office at the 2016 General Assembly after meeting the financial and participation requirements including having one of our youth, Amy Hamilton, attend an annual conference for Unitarian Universalist Youth Envoys.

As always, worshipping among thousands of fellow Unitarian Universalists with inspirational speakers and musicians, is an experience every UU should have at least once.
Participating in worship, whether listening to the sermon or taking part in a ritual or engaging in silent reflection, is the primary way that most adult members grow spiritually. Our monthly worship themes this year followed the Soul Matters program as we considered “What does it mean to be a community of...” Covenant, Healing, Story, Presence, Prophecy, Identity, Risk, Transformation, Embodiment and Joy. Our Worship Associates program was fully implemented this year, adding new voices and perspectives to the worship programs both over the summer and during the year.

In order to provide an opportunity for all ages and stages to be engaged with the same theme to facilitate conversation across the generations, we held multigenerational worship services once a month. These services focused on the church wide monthly themes. All ages were invited to attend.

Children and Youth participated in the multigenerational worship services in a variety of ways. Generally, a child was asked to ring the gong. Children and youth were also invited to lead, individually or with a parent, the chalice lighting. The Coming of Agers (8th-9th graders) created props for the early Christmas Eve worship service. Additionally, two children’s choirs sang at some of the multigenerational worship services. The Cherubs was a choir of 3 year olds through 6 year olds. The Children’s Choir was a group of seven year olds to thirteen year olds.

Three worship services were led by children or youth. In December the Explorers (6th – 7th graders) led a worship service, Trees of the Dancing

Belonging to Worship Associates gives me a greater sense of commitment to the church. As a professional speaker, I find it deeply gratifying to be able to apply my skills in the pulpit, and also in the planning of worship.
Reverend Roberta has shown us how it is possible to show great creativity in worship, and it is exciting to use that freedom to promote our common spiritual evolution.

—Jim Curtis, Worship Associate and member
Goats. This was a large undertaking, and some children and youth from other age groups were invited to participate as well. In March the Youth led a worship service focusing on the theme of the month, Risk. They explored Risk through our Unitarian Universalist Principles. The youth chose to use resources provided by Soul Matters for portions of the worship service. They also wrote original pieces, chose pieces from the hymnals, and used collections of stories from the CYRE library and Tapestry of Faith in developing the worship service. Finally, 2nd and 3rd graders participating in the Age of Reason Rite of Passage will lead a worship service in June. At this worship service the Age of Reasoners will present their first credo to their families, friends and the congregation.

One of the most successful Adult Religious Exploration (ARE) programs held in Fall 2016 was a panel discussion on volatile political unrest in Turkey. Late last summer we had established a connection with the American Turkish Friendship Association, a local Muslim association in Newark, Delaware. We learned of their interest in holding a public seminar and providing

The Worship Associates program has helped me to find my voice in the congregation. I’ve grown in my confidence to speak my truth, to share my passions and my beliefs with the community and to feel connections to my faith and to the members of the church in a deep and satisfying way that I never anticipated when I first became a part of the group. I believe this experience has helped me to grow spiritually more than any other experience I’ve had in this congregation.

—Linda Sanders, Worship Associate and member

"I really liked the Youth Service. I liked hearing them talk about what risk meant to them. The coffee house was fun and I loved performing my karate for everyone".

—Audrey Donohue, age 10

Acting out the story of The Enormous Turnip
experts for the panel, which we were very willing to host and publicize. In addition, several women in the association were able to prepare and serve Turkish food following the discussion. Close to 30 people from our church and the community attended this very successful event.

ARE also held a well-attended, three-part workshop on Retirement Living Decisions, led by a retired geriatric social worker. Approximately 25 seniors, mostly church members, attended these programs held on three consecutive Sunday afternoons last fall. The second session was a panel discussion in which First U members discussed their own decisions for senior living, and specialists from both the Delaware Department of Health & Human Services and the City of Philadelphia offered information on valuable services available.

Another well-attended program was led by a retired nurse and advocate for honoring end-of-life wishes, based on her own experiences with her deceased father, which led to her prosecution by the Pennsylvania criminal justice system (and garnered national press attention).

We continue to support the Sunday morning Torah Study Group which has expanded to bring the celebration of Jewish holidays to the entire congregation and the World Religions Forum. We offer an almost monthly Bible for Liberals discussion, and Rev. Roberta has been conducting a regular post-service sermon discussion.

The John G. MacKinnon Memorial Library is a welcoming space and accessible resource that contributes to our understanding and practice of Unitarian Universalism. Collections include UU and other religions, spirituality, life transitions and challenges, ethical concerns in our communities and world, and church organization, with non-fiction and fiction for adults, youth and children.

Throughout the year we display old and new titles featuring seasons and general interest, religious holidays and history, current affairs and social justice initiatives. The Book Corner donated a library copy of this year’s UUA Common Read, Rev. Dr. William Barber’s The Third Reconstruction: How a Moral Movement Is Overcoming the Politics of Division and Fear. Recently given by Hetty Francke are the DVD and book, And Still I Rise: Black America Since MLK. Other new titles of note include: Love is Love: A comic book anthology to benefit the survivors of the Orlando Pulse shooting (2016); Forging Faith, Building Community: African American faith experiences in Delaware, 1800-1980 (Connie Cooper & Lewis Baldwin, 2015); and Into the Arms of Strangers: stories of the Kindertransport (Harris & Oppenheimer, 2000).


For children and youth, a new Sagar fund purchase was Each Kindness (Jacqueline Woodson, 2012). Also new for young people are: Quiet Hero: The Ira Hayes Story (S.D. Nelson, 2006), about Hayes, a Pima Indian who
helped raise the flag at Iwo Jima during WWII; and Cinda Crane donated a copy of The Next Place (Warren Hansen, 1997).

**Children & Youth Religious Exploration (CYRE):** Our children are the future of the church and of Unitarian Universalism. Together with the Director of Religious Exploration, Catherine Williamson, the Children & Youth Religious Exploration Team works directly with the children and youth in tailoring the curriculum to fit contemporary needs, as well as in guiding them through finding service projects to fight injustice and transform the world. This work would not be possible without the nearly 40 individuals volunteering with CYRE, making this the largest volunteer base within the church. This sizeable volunteer base is needed, as we serve more than 70 children and youth and their families.

This year we tried something new, in an attempt to unite our children and youth with members of the congregation who don’t currently have children in our program. Over the summer, we invited individuals to facilitate a Sunday morning program. We tied the lessons into our principles, and if they were a member of another team or committee at church, they were asked to incorporate that into their morning plan. We were able to include a morning of yoga, knitting lessons, earth worm workshop, drumming circle, and gardening with Buildings and Grounds. This gave the children an opportunity to build relationships with other adults in our church, to learn more about what goes on in our church, as well as the chance to invest in it. We are hoping to continue to work on the garden that we weeded, planted and mulched with the Building and Grounds team members. This helped to nourish the minds and spirits of all participants, as well as to build a beloved community.

The CYRE curriculum is developmentally appropriate and is designed to build on

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**Children & Youth Religious Education vision**

“Our children and youth affirm their identity as members of the Unitarian Universalist faith community, embrace their evolving spirituality and practice Unitarian Universalist values in all facets of their lives.”

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Learning how to knit
previous years. Active learning is emphasized, where children and youth engage with the material on Sunday mornings as well as through special projects, such as social advocacy programs and field trips. The curriculum also integrates the monthly worship themes.

To further enhance the experiences of children and youth, and to build stronger bonds across age groups, in addition to multigenerational worship, this year we have added "fifth Sunday" programs which consist of a worship service and activity for all children and youth together.

Beyond Sunday morning CYRE classes, the CYRE program is in the midst of the Age of Reason program for 2nd and 3rd graders. Children meet with Catherine Williamson and volunteers to explore their own beliefs in more depth and to write their first credos. Then in the spring, the children present their beliefs as part of a special service. This marks the beginning of their journeys as Unitarian Universalists.

Another program that CYRE ran this year is Our Whole Lives (OWL), a comprehensive, lifespan sexuality education curricula for use in both secular settings and faith communities, for 4th, 5th and 6th graders. This program, sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association, “dismantles stereotypes and assumptions, builds self-acceptance and self-esteem, fosters healthy relationships, improves decision making, and has the potential to save lives.”* The program ran successfully, with more than 12 students enrolled, including some students who do not attend First Unitarian. Each year this program is offered for a different age group.

An important addition to what the CYRE team provided this year is the development of our Safety policies, specific to children and youth. This included information on topics such as evacuation, first aid, lockdown and drills, background check sign ups, and signs of abuse. We held our annual Parent Orientation

* http://www.uua.org/re/owl
meeting, and an additional guides, assistants and volunteers training which covered these important materials and policies. This will be an ongoing effort in order to keep everyone informed and safe. The response was very positive, and everyone required to attend did so.

The Youth Group for 9th—12th graders provides a welcoming and engaging environment that supports teens in social, emotional, and spiritual growth. Youth programming focuses on group-building, worship, social action, leadership development, and building positive relationships with the adults of our congregation and the Unitarian Universalist community.

The Youth started out the year with a kick-off retreat, followed in October by a successful Haunted House which they helped to construct and “spook” children and adults while raising funds to help immigrant families in need.

Their annual bake sale helped to support the Independent Living for Young Adult program and a spring pancake breakfast - including pancakes, sausages & vegan oatmeal—raised funds for their Youth Service trip to take place during the summer of 2018. This trip, sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist College of Social Justice will take them to West Virginia, where they will have a hands-on experience working and learning from Appalachian communities struggling for a new, post-coal future.

As always, the Youth inspired us all with their Youth worship service in March, including a fun and uplifting music video they produced while on their Poconos retreat.

When not meeting formally in Youth Group, several of our Youth help with children’s religious exploration and operating audio visual equipment in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings. Meet-ups with another UU youth group rounded out their year of fun and learning.
First Unitarian Church responded to a significant need for fellowship and support in the aftermath of the election last fall. The Inauguration Week activities and the programs that have grown out of them were all well-attended and well-received. There has not been much joy around these issues, but participants certainly seemed to find inspiration and fulfillment in being part of a community of faith that is actively engaged with the larger community. The restructuring of the social action programs is almost complete. Using the new system we learned from Kathleen McTigue, Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist College for Social Justice, there are three coalition/fusion Task Forces underway: Human Rights; Environmental Justice; and Independent Living for Young Adults.

In January, our nation inaugurated a President whose stated positions are totally incongruent with progressive values. We offered a series of events that would equip us to continue to advocate for those values in a difficult time.

“De-escalation and Intervention Skills” : Using materials provided by our Standing On The Side Of Love staff, this workshop helped us to understand what to do if we found ourselves in the position of witnessing a vulnerable person (Muslim, person of color, immigrant) being subjected to harassment. Several dozen people attended the two sessions of this workshop.

**Courage for Racial Justice and Collective Liberation:** We were pleased to co-sponsor this workshop, led by Chris Crass, well-known UU anti-racist activist who led this day long workshop. The UU Society of Mill Creek hosted the workshop, attended by well more than 100 people.

**Martin Luther King Day of Service:** Thanks to the work of our Director of Lifespan Religious Exploration, Catherine Williamson, and the Children’s Religious Education Team, we had a lively day planned with a variety of hands-on service activities. The word spread rapidly on social media, and we were overwhelmed by the attendance. Many families from the community participated.

In addition to baking for Emmanuel Dining Room, making quilts for A.I. DuPont hospital, and preparing toiletry kits for families at the Ronald McDonald house, children and youth partnered with Palmer Elementary School.

In search of a local community in need, one of our team members arranged for First Unitarian members to go to
Palmer Elementary School as part of our MLK Day of Service. We assisted with a range of school projects which included painting a mural, designing bulletin boards, moving and organizing a library, and cleaning up garbage outside and on the school grounds. We also cleared out a large, densely overgrown garden. Because this school has a deep need for hands-on support, this experience led to building a plan for an ongoing partnership, not only for the CYRE families but the larger congregation.

**Reaffirmation of UU Values:** On the eve of the inauguration, more than 100 members gathered in the Parish Hall for a simple soup supper. We then ‘took the oath’ together to reaffirm our UU Principles. Congregational leaders set up 7 tables, one for each of our Principles. At these tables people could learn more about each principle and take a simple action to promote that principle.

**Active Hope: Come Together to Face the Mess We Are In:** On Inauguration Day we provided sanctuary for people who wanted to sit together in communal silence. Afterwards, we hosted an Active Hope trainer. Several dozen people attended this workshop.

**Martin Luther King Jr. Week Celebratory Concert:** Thanks to the work of our Honorary Minister of Music, Scott Ward, we once again hosted the annual concert of the DuPont Diversity Choir. A good will offering was taken to support the anti-racism work of YWCA Delaware.

**Community Interfaith Service Commemorating the Anniversary of Roe. V. Wade:** We were pleased to host an interfaith worship service honoring the work of Planned Parenthood of Delaware. Clergy from Christian, Jewish and UU traditions shared stories of faithful decision-making.

Following up on the January events, on March 12, the First Unitarian Church co-sponsored the first in a series of Forums in the area of social justice. “The Failing Drug War in Murdertown: a radical rethinking of police and community relations” was a controversial subject that brought over 100 people to the church sanctuary to hear from experts on the subject. Major Neill Franklin, who served for many years as a law enforcement officer on the streets of Baltimore, presented the keynote address on what Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP) is doing to lower incarceration rates among minority youth and reduce violence. A panel discussion and questions from the attendees followed. Panel members included activist and writer Patrice Gibbs, State Senate Majority Leader Margaret Rose Henry, and Kathleen Jennings, former chief state prosecutor and current chief administrator for New Castle County.

**Refugee Assistance Program:** First Unitarian Church of Wilmington says “Yes”! When Jewish Family Services (JFS) asked for help with their Refugee resettlements from various faith-based and community organizations in...
New Castle County, we eagerly stepped up. After an overview of the program from Sarah Green of JFS, 25 church members said they’d like to help. There is usually very little advance notice of a refugee arrival date once their approvals have been secured from the UN and US Immigration Services. But we had no shortage of helpers.

Our family was a “reunification” refugee, being reunited with family members who are already living in the area. In addition, their extended family in Delaware is providing the housing; so our role with the family is to be a welcoming presence and help with a variety of newcomer needs to enable them to feel at home in Delaware. Our team has provided transportation to their English as a Second Language classes; made connections with native speakers to ease their transition; arranged friendly conversation groups; brought them a homemade meal; sent gifts of special and tasty foods; made connections to get them acquainted with the library system; sent hand-made Valentine cards and notes (including from our young people); helped with high school registration and acquainted the school with the student’s special language needs; and with Literacy Delaware were ready to assist in the process of getting the college-age daughter on her pathway to college which will follow intensive English language study. Our goal has been to facilitate the family on their road to independence and self-sufficiency as quickly as practical. Often a helping hand is all that is needed, and that is what we are trying to do. This neighborliness is no more than we would extend to any new neighbor, and speaking for the entire team, “We were glad to be there for you.”

With all that has happened over the past year, our core outreach programs continue to thrive.

First Unitarian Church again provided a monthly meal to Emmanuel Dining Room, thanks to a strong volunteer team of cooks and servers (about 30 who rotate between months, and the addition of new members regularly). On the 19th of the month we prepare our Chicken Shepherd’s Pie casseroles, and then transport them to EDR for overnight storage, along with applesauce. On the 20th of the month we reheat and serve the meal to about 225 men, women and children. The program costs remain the same as in previous years - about $200/month, or $2,400/year for the supplies. Our main income source is the special monthly offering once a year, which this year - for the first time - brought in all the funds we needed (thanks to Rev. Roberta’s strong pitch in November).

New this year: Cookies. In the last year EDR has seen their dessert donations dwindle, so in February 2017 we launched an additional cookie donation program, to provide our own desserts for our monthly meal, with a goal of 16 dozen cookies...
each month. While it has only been two months, the program has been successful, and we anticipate this continuing for the foreseeable future.

We are pleased to continue this program within our church, to help serve our underserved in the city of Wilmington for over 30 years now. With a strong commitment to help our community, financial solvency, and a growing team from within our congregation, we anticipate this program continuing for years to come.

**Independent Living for Young Adults (ILYA)** provides support for young adults when they age out of foster care at 18 years of age, working with social service agencies to fill existing gaps in service, as well as advocating at the state level of legislature. By acknowledging the inherent worth and dignity of these young people and supporting some of their most basic needs, the team expresses our UU values clearly by facilitating the processes by which First Unitarian members can contribute.

The following are the goals of the ILYA program:

- Prevent homelessness for young people aging out of foster care.
- Reinforce the value of continued education with emotional and practical support.
- Facilitate furnishing a first apartment according to the preferences of the young person.
- Recognize and celebrate holidays, birthdays and milestones with the young person.
- Promote a sense of self-worth by demonstrating interest and caring.

The initiatives that the ILYA program has undertaken include:

- Educate the congregation about the situations faced by young people aging out of foster care.
- Raise funds and request specific donations that support the ILYA projects (Student Care Packages, Holiday Giving, One-time Supportive Grants, New Apartment Kits, Graduation Backpacks & Party and Educational Support (tutoring).
- Partner with state-provided Independent Living Coordinators to identify young people needing assistance and facilitate providing the support needed and to identify unmet needs and explore our capability to address them.
- Partner with outside organizations to avoid redundancy and gain efficiency and additional support for projects where appropriate/possible.
- Advocate for this population with social service departments, state government and any individuals who may take action to assist with the development of successful independent lives for these young people.
- Create boundary-crossing coalitions by encouraging...
personal (face-to-face when possible) contact with young person and ILYA team/volunteers & working with other groups & individuals to obtain support for projects.

- Partner with Catholic Charities for furniture/household goods donations that allow “our” young people to “shop” for free at the Catholic Charities Thrift Store.

- Partner with other churches/organizations to provide mutual support and exchange knowledge/ideas that further services for this population.

Our Green Sanctuary team is working to bring about environmental justice, promoting ethical eating to lessen the impact of global warming and learning about the hardships of people living in South Bridge where flooding often occurs in Wilmington.

Green Sanctuary is evolving into a task force focused on Sustainability, the Seventh Principle, and Environmental Justice. We were involved with the following projects:

**Public Witness**
- Participated in the Clean Water Delaware rally in Dover

**Congregational Education and Advocacy**
- Attended several seminars of the Delaware Nature Society for Water Warriors promoting good uses of water to preserve the environment.
- Participated in the Energy Seminar at Trinity Presbyterian Church sponsored by Delaware Interfaith Power & Light

**Sustainability**
- Continued our support of Bright Spot Urban Farm, including helping to weed gardens.
- Provided Sunday morning hospitality with vegan offerings to give people ideas of ethical eating.
- Partnered with our vegan friends with two Friday night vegan potluck dinners.

**Community**
- Planned and conducted a summer Sunday worship service. Marie Reed, President of South Bridge Civic Association, spoke about their flooding problems.
- Attended monthly meetings of the South Bridge Civic Association to learn how we could assist them with their wetland park project as well as a homeowner mold mitigation effort.

For many years now, we have been selling **House Pins** at First Unitarian in support of the Home Life Management Center of the YWCA Delaware.

The Center provides much-needed transitional housing and training to homeless families, including women who have suffered from addiction or domestic violence. The goal of the Center is to provide safe housing while helping the families find permanent housing and permanent employment.

In response to the increased cost of House Pins we have begun to make bead bracelets and earrings, using donated materials. We donate the entire sale price of the bracelets and earrings to the YWCA.

In the 2016-2017 calendar year, the House Pin and Jewelry Sales team donated $2,000 to the YWCA Home Life Management Center, bringing our total donations since 1997 (20 years!) to $24,500. The YWCA highlighted the First Unitarian program in their Spring 2017 issue of **YWCA Mission Talk**.

Vegan Thanksgiving Potluck Dinner
First Unitarian Church has been an active participant with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) over many years.

During fiscal year 2016-17, First Unitarian members and friends contributed more than $25,350 to UUSC in response to Guest At Your Table, Justice Sunday, donated gifts of stock, pledges, fund raising campaigns, and online giving. This was an exceptional year of support as we, First Unitarian members, recognize that UUSC promotes our values and accomplishes social justice on our behalf around the world.

During the year, First Unitarian participated in the following programs and activities:

- **UUSC Coffee Project:** The Fair Trade Equal Exchange/UUSC Coffee Project and its sale of products was sustained throughout the year. Thanks to Steve Marek and family, the Project had sales of over $5,000, supporting economic justice, and placing First Unitarian in the top 5% of UU churches supporting this program.

- **Black Lives Matter (BLM) Fund Raiser:** In August and September of 2016, the UUSC local team supported the BLM project and raised $610 for the project by selling 61 pounds of Doyle Dobbin’s donated honey. The funds were used for banners and other project costs.

- **The Guest-At-Your-Table (GAYT) UUSC Program for all ages took place the six weeks prior to Thanksgiving. Its two basic goals are to educate members about the worldwide UUSC programs and to promote giving to support these programs. These goals were achieved by working with the CYRE, distributing GAYT boxes for families to share the program at home, and participating in worship services including helping with the “Setting of the Table” the Sunday before Thanksgiving. In addition, over 80 pounds of Doyle’s donated honey were sold for over $800 to support UUSC. Over $5,000 was raised and donated to support UUSC programs.

- **Justice Sunday:** On April 9, 2017, Justice Sunday was observed and a special offering was received to support the UUSC social justice work throughout the world.

- **Humanitarian Crises:** When crises happen, the UUSC team promotes support for those who are most marginalized in through timely special giving to UUSC. Some of the ongoing crises being addressed are Ebola relief, Somalia and East Africa Famine Relief, Syrian Refugee Relief, Central American Refugee Relief, and Haiti Earthquake Relief.

- **Public Policy Statements/Resolution:** The Board of Trustees assigned the UUSC Team the task of managing public policy statements, which generally take the form of social justice resolutions, for the congregation. This assignment resulted in three resolutions being approved last year and used in a variety of ways throughout this year. They are:
  - The New Jim Crow Resolution
  - The Black Lives Matter Resolution
  - Environmental Justice and Climate Change Resolution
Following the workshop series “Being White in the Black Lives Matter Movement” in winter 2015–2016 and congregational discussion in the spring, members and friends gathered on Memorial Day Weekend to dedicate and display banners in support of Black Lives Matter.

More than 100 members, many wearing the distinctive yellow tee-shirts of Standing on the Side of Love, marched from the sanctuary after the Sunday worship to bear witness as two eight-foot banners were mounted on wooden frames facing both northbound and southbound traffic on Concord Pike.

The dedication and celebration included a wiccan ritual of safety and protection conducted by Kate Franta. Similar expressions of support for Black Lives at other Unitarian Universalist churches had been vandalized, and we ordered extra copies of our banner to have in reserve.

The church’s public commitment to Black Lives received considerable press notice. Two months elapsed before any vandalism occurred, but on the night of July 30, the word “Black” was cut from one of the banners.

In a News-Journal interview, Rev. Roberta said, “First Unitarian Church is a largely white congregation. After considerable study and reflection, we erected these banners not only to state our spiritual commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement, but also to spark a conversation within the community about institutional racism and violence aimed at people of color. The person or persons who vandalized our congregation’s public affirmation of faith were apparently unwilling to have that conversation. Instead, they chose vandalism over dialogue, striking with a knife against our highest principles—the spirit of love and compassion that we are trying to embody as allies of Black Lives Matter.” (Wilmington News-Journal, Aug. 1, 2016)

After a second act of vandalism damaged a replacement sign, the church announced that each time one of our banners was damaged, we would make a donation to Black Lives of UU. Although there were a few venomous calls and emails, many expressions of support—and donations—came from the larger community.

Following another incident, a small vigil on August 10 was
followed by a rededication service and the installation of new banners on August 21.

At that time, the banner was raised to deter further vandalism. Later, the wood frame was used to display additional banners highlighting First Unitarian’s values: Love & Compassion, Freedom & Justice, Growth & Discovery, Wonder & Joy.

Also participating in the Black Lives Matter initiatives, The Delaware Coalition to Dismantle The New Jim Crow, led by First Unitarian along with others from Mother African Union Church and other faith communities, continued with its efforts to “create a society where all members of the target community have a fair and equal opportunity for success.

The mission of the organization is to “Create forums and initiatives to define, clarify, educate, advocate, and coordinate projects for solutions to racial discrimination and institutional policies and systems in a way that allows hope, opportunity, and success in the quality of life for minority citizens.”

During the past year, activities have included hosting meetings of the DE Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow, rallying members to attend ongoing meetings at other churches for the monthly gatherings, and being aware of protests in which we can demonstrate.

More information on this important initiative is available by emailing endnewjimcrowde.org.

Members of First Unitarian Church were deeply involved in the inaugural Peace Week Delaware, a project of the Movement for a Culture of Peace. Judy Govatos, Jeff Lott, Marie Oakberg, and Sue Wilson served on the Peace Week steering committee, which created the statewide framework, website, guidelines, and support for all Peace Week events.

One of the week’s highlights was the talk at First Unitarian by John Dear, former Jesuit priest and internationally known advocate for nonviolence, who co-founded Campaign Nonviolence and the Nonviolent Cities program. Nearly 200 people attended this event, which was organized at the church by Sue Wilson, Debbi Zarek, and members of the Outreach Team.

Peace Week Delaware was an unqualified success, exceeding early expectations and meeting all of its key objectives—one of which was to connect peace-loving people and organizations across the state. Between September 18 and 25, more than 40 public events were offered by over 30 different organizations, churches, and individuals—including events in both Kent and Sussex counties. Several key organizing meetings, including an event sponsor workshop, were held at First Unitarian. And vital financial support was provided by the June and Russell Peterson Fund for...
Social Justice, an independent endowment that honors the memory of the late Governor Russ Peterson, a longtime member of the church.

The second Peace Week Delaware will be September 17–24, 2017. For more information and ways you can become involved, visit peaceweekdelaware.org or speak with Sue Wilson or Jeff Lott.

Throughout the year, members of First Unitarian participated in numerous public witness events, such as the National Moral Day of Action for the Moral Declaration, the Women’s March on Washington on the day after the Inauguration and the People’s Climate March 2017, held in April. In addition, First Unitarian was honored this year by the NAACP for our work with Black Lives Matter.

The First Unitarian Social Justice Connector continues to inform and educate on issues of social justice of interest to First Unitarian and our community. Members and visitors can easily find it from our website or go directly to the site listed below.

The feeling of being united with so many others on Jan. 21, 2017 will be something I will not forget. We all marched for women’s rights, whether we were white, black, brown, man, woman, LGBTQ; no matter our religion, ethnicity, background, class

—Elyse Reznick, on the Women’s March

“We couldn’t hear or see the speakers, but it didn’t matter—our presence was what really mattered. We loved the camaraderie and seeing the creative expressions of support for women, people of color, LGBTQ, and other vulnerable populations.”

—Edris Harrell, on the Women’s March

NAACP honor First Unitarian Church

Social Justice Connector: https://firstusocialaction.wordpress.com
First Unitarian members and friends at the Women’s March on Washington and Newark
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD

First Unitarian members, visitors and friends made the following contributions from May 2016—April 2017:

Black Lives Matter— honey sales $610
Children and Families First $1,006
Delaware Coalition against Domestic Violence $1,022
Emmanuel Dining Room (meal prepared and served for 200+, once a month) $3,641
Lutheran Community Services $1,103
Grants for Growth: UU Congregation of Southern DE $1,847
Independent Living for Young Adults:
  Holiday giving $330
  Graduation Backpacks $436
  Support grants $2,329
Movement for a Culture of Peace $1,117
Pacem in Terris $1,157
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC):
  Guest at Your Table $4,200
  Honey Sales $800
  April special collection $900
UU—United Nations Office $742
YWCA $1,251
YWCA—House pin sales $2,000

Total donations through First Unitarian Society $24,491

Direct contributions by First Unitarian Members:
EDR International Dinners (approximately 250 seats purchased) $6,250
UUSC: Ebola Relief, Somalia and East Africa Famine Relief, Syrian Refugee Relief, Central America Refugee Relief, Haiti Earthquake Relief, Justice Sunday, stocks, endowment, major gifts & other miscellaneous gifts $20,350
Other non-cash gifts of backpacks and holiday gifts
2016—2017 Financial Information
March 31, 2017

Your Dollars At Work

- Worship and Music: 35%
- Lifespan Religious Education: 13%
- Outreach and Social Justice: 13%
- Fellowship and Pastoral Care: 10%
- Growth of UUism: 29%

Sources of Revenue

- Pledge Income: 72%
- Rental Income: 16%
- Fundraisers: 5%
- Plate collections & other donations: 1%
- Investments: 1%
- Other Income: 1%

Investments and Fixed Assets

Net Assets (Unrestricted)
$286,412

Net Assets (Restricted)
$842,783

Capital Campaign Fund
$1,189,414

Total Net Assets:
$2,318,808
Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, Developmental Minister

Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music

Catherine Williamson, Director of Religious Education

Marina VanRenssen, Business Manager

Miesha Lowman, Accounting Assistant

Ernie Congo, Building Coordinator

Harold Cannon, Night Custodian

Sam Russell, Sunday Custodian

Elizabeth Donovan & Grace Ruoff, Childcare
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the contributors to our 2016-17 Annual Report:

Bev Bach  Barbara Lenahan
Jan Blanchfield  Jeff Lott
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Cindy Cohen  Marge Meyermann
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Holly Feldheim  Paul Pinson
Pam Finkelman  Elyse Reznick
Rev. Roberta Finkelstein  Linda Sanders
Kate Franta  Richard Speck
Judy Govatos  Tracy Spinka-Doms
Vivian Gray  Janet Tillman
Deborah Griffin  Marina VanRenssen
Bill Hardham  Jim Weddell
Edris Harrell  Lori Weddell
Arthur Hidell  Catherine Williamson
Marilyn Hyte  Judy Windle
Paul Jacobs  Debbi Zarek
Philip Krape
OUR PRINCIPLES

Unitarian Universalists covenant with each other to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process Within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community, with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are part

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